

Eternal Heaven

Rightly Dividing The Word: Shelf 5 — Volume 50

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Some concept of life after death is found in all cultures that have existed in history throughout the world. The reason for this is that people simply do not want to live without hope. Various words than heaven are used to describe this hope, but the idea is an understood belief among all religious groups that have existed.

Different ideas surround the heavenly picture of each particular religious group. Nevertheless, people have always had enough desire for hope to perceive that there is something beyond this material world that is the real “home of the soul.” It is only when we turn to the Bible that we find a tangible reassurance of life beyond death in a realm called heaven.

When Jesus sensed the anxiety of the disciples after they heard His words of departure, He gave them hope by saying,

In My Father’s house are many mansions [abiding places]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also (Jn 14:2,3).

We seek an eternal “homeland” wherein the sufferings of this world have passed out of existence. The Hebrew writer revealed that those fathers of faith in the Old Testament era ...

... died in faith, not having received the promises, **but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country**" (Hb 11:13-16).

They sought the homeland that is **"incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you"** (1 Pt 1:4). However, they had only a shadow of revelation concerning heaven in comparison to what we have in the New Testament.

The New Testament brought to light many things about which the Old Testament believers had only brief glimpses of revelation.

Herein is our hope, our refuge, our present comfort in a world of despair, suffering and pain. We are now **"in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began"** (Ti 1:2). We have **"fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast"** (Hb 6:18,19). We thus seek this hope **"which is laid up for you in heaven"** (Cl 1:5). This hope is our reassurance in this life; it is that which gives meaning to existence and comfort in all the struggles through which all who believe must go.

Chapter 1

~ The Nature Of Heaven ~

From an earthly point of view, it is difficult to understand the nature of heaven. It is simply hard to understand that which we have not experienced. However, one way we can better understand heaven is to understand the nature or character of those faithful believers the Bible says are there or will be there waiting for us. To some extent we can also comprehend this realm of existence by the Spirit's **metaphors** that excite our thinking concerning

how it will be. We also understand heaven by understanding God who is there. The nature and character of God that is revealed in the Bible through Jesus, and the nature of the faithful who will be there, explain to some extent the environment of heaven.

A. Heaven Is Of God's Nature

Heaven is an existence after the nature of God. During His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke of the Father who is *“in heaven”* (Mt 6:9; 10:31,32; Jn 12:28). The Old Testament writers spoke of the Father **in heaven** (See 1 Kg 8:30; Ps 14:2; Ec 5:2). Jesus spoke of angels in heaven when He said, *“For I say to you that in heaven their angels see the face of My Father who is in heaven”* (Mt 18:10; see Mt 24:36). The Hebrew writer stated concerning Jesus, *“For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, that are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us”* (Hb 9:24).

Jesus has now ascended into the heavenly and has been seated at the right hand of God (See Hb 8:1; 10:12). Therefore, the Father, Son and angels are presently in this realm that is called heaven.

Our first step to understand the nature of heaven, therefore, **is to understand the personality, character and being of Jesus, for it is Jesus who reveals the character of God.** Jesus said, *“He who has seen Me has seen the Father”* (Jn 14:9; see Jn 1:18; 6:32; 8:42). We can understand heaven by the nature of the Father who resides there. But we can understand the nature of the Father only through Jesus who has revealed Him to us. In other words, **the better we know Jesus, the better we will understand the nature of the realm of the heavenly.**

Those who do not know the nature of Jesus cannot know the nature of that realm to which all Christians are headed.

Jesus *“came from the Father”* (Jn 16:28; see 13:3; 16:5,10,17). He and the Father are one (See Jn 10:30; 17:11,21-24). The only way, therefore, to understand that realm to which we are destined is to understand the One who came from and returned to it. And the only way we can understand this Messenger from heaven is through the words of **Matthew, Mark, Luke and John**.

It is true that the Scriptures describe God after the attributes that we possess. *“God is love”* (1 Jn 4:8). **God is merciful** (See Nm 14:18). **God is patient** (See 2 Pt 3:9). **God is kind** (See Ne 9:17). In reading these, and many other anthropopathisms in reference to the personality of God, we in some way can understand God by understanding the best of these traits that can be manifested in people.

However, there is still a limit here in understanding the fullness of the “love” or “mercy” or “kindness” of God. We would not limit God’s love to the maximum limits of our capacity to love. Neither would we limit His kindness, or any emotional capacity of God to the most kind person on earth. God can love or be kind far beyond our maximums. He can be patient long after our patience has run its course. Therefore, we must remind ourselves not to place limits on God’s character by the limitations of our maximum spiritual capabilities. God is far greater in character than we would ever hope to be. We will never “out love” God.

It is important to understand the above point when studying the nature of God’s character as it is revealed through Jesus. Jesus “emptied Himself” and *“made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant.”* He came in the likeness of man in order to reveal the character of the Father who remains in spirit (Ph 2:6-8). Nevertheless, **Jesus’ ability to manifest the maximum of the character of the Father through an “emptied state” is challenging for us to understand.**

Was the greatness of the character of Jesus the maximum character of God? We cannot know this,

for we see only that which was manifested through Jesus on earth and explained by the inspired writers in our words. Nevertheless, Jesus is our only “living dictionary” of the Father. And what a marvelous dictionary He is. We are limited to reading the story of His life. The time is coming, however, when we will personally see Him as He is (See 1 Jn 3:2).

God knew our inability to understand the fullness or extent of His tenderness, His capacity to love, to show mercy, and to be patient. In order to reveal Himself to us, however, God had to begin with Jesus in the humbled state of existence in the flesh of man. *“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him”* (Jn 1:18; see Ex 33:20; 1 Tm 6:16). Jesus *“proceeded forth and came from God”* in order to reveal the nature of the Father (See Jn 8:42). *“All things have been delivered to Me by My Father,”* Jesus said, *“and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him”* (Mt 11:27).

Those to whom the Father is revealed are those who accept the Son. These are those who perceive the Father through the Son.

Therefore, we must seek to know Jesus. We must be loving in order to understand the love of Jesus, and thus, the Father. *“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love”* (1 Jn 4:8). The greater we love, the more we will understand the Father who is in heaven. Our loving, therefore, defines our understanding of that realm to which we are headed. The environment of heaven is illustrated by the loving nature of the Father, the Son, and you and me.

B. Heaven Is Of The Nature Of Love

Heaven is an existence after the nature of loving Christians. Peter stated that heaven is a place *“where righteousness dwells”* (2 Pt 3:13). It is a dwelling wherein resides those who have suffered

through life in order to enter this rest (See Rv 14:13). It is a place, therefore, for the recovering persecuted saints (See Mt 5:12). It is a place reserved for the meek, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers (See Mt 5:4-10). It is for those who have been faithful, even to the point of suffering death for the name of Jesus (See Rv 2:10).

In order to partially understand heaven, we must look to a faithful Christian. Heaven will be of the character of the faithful who are now headed for it.

Nothing defiled will enter into heaven. *“But there will by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie ...”* (Rv 21:27). *“But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie”* (Rv 22:15). Paul was very clear on this point in **Galatians 5:19-21**. Those who practice the works of the flesh *“will not inherit the kingdom of God”* (Gl 5:21).

Heaven will be after the nature of those who practice the fruit of the Spirit (See Gl 5:22,23). Heaven will not be polluted with sin. It will not be a place of those who seek sinful behavior against their fellow man. Heaven will be a place for those who love one another and seek to serve the needs of others.

C. Heaven In Contrast To The Present

Heaven is an existence that is in contrast to the present. Peter revealed,

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; **both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up*** (2 Pt 3:10).

This present existence, this material world, is temporary, physical and subject to degradation. It is a world of pain and suffering. It is a world of natural calamity. It is thus a dwelling that urges us

to look for another. And this is Peter's point: *"We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells"* (2 Pt 3:13). Because Peter reveals that this present heavens and earth will come to a destructive climax, he teaches that there will be something different and better to come.

We must contrast this present heavens and earth with the one that is to come simply because the New Testament writers encouraged us to look for a better place of dwelling.

Though this comparison between now and then does not allow us to completely understand that which is on the other side of this material world, **we must at least envision the new heavens and earth to be in many ways what we do not see in this world.** In other words, this world inflicts pain and suffering (See Is 35:10; 51:11; 65:19; Rv 7:11; 21:4). In the world to come, however, there will be no pain and suffering (See Rv 21:4).

Using this argument to understand the world beyond this world is not a perfect argument. At least, however, there are some things in this world that are certainly the opposite of what will be. The opposite of this world paints a glorious picture of the world to come.

We could assume that heaven is not a physical realm as we understand physical in defining the word "heaven." Paul stated that *"flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"* (1 Co 15:50). Heaven is not physical after our definition of what is "flesh and blood." In some way, the heaven to come is a place of "incorruption" and "immortality." It is a place where our body that is designed for this present dwelling, must be changed in order to dwell in the heavenly realm (See 1 Co 15:50).

This present heavens and earth will pass away (See 2 Pt 3:10,11). **Our present physical bodies will put on incorruption and immortality** (See 1 Co 15:52-54). The fact that our present body will

be changed in order to provide a new habitation for our spirit (See 2 Co 5:1-8), indicates that the new heavens and earth will be a **tangible dwelling**. It will not be a place where we will float around in oblivion or space, detached from presence.

The Bible does not teach the Buddha concept that we will eventually reach Nirvana, an existence where we become as a drop of water that enters the ocean and loses its individual identity, but not its existence.

We will maintain our identity in heaven, and in order to do such, **we must in some way in heaven maintain our presence, our ability to maintain location**. “Flesh and blood” that are now dependent on this present physical environment will not inherit what is to come. But this does not mean that we will disappear into nothingness. We will be changed. This corruptible and mortal body will put on a “spiritual body” that will dwell in a new heavens and earth that is created for its presence (See 1 Co 15:43,44).

At the final coming of Jesus, it will be our physical bodies that will be changed, not our spiritual self. We will retain our spiritual identity. In other words, God will not transform us into some kind of “spiritual robot.” We will retain our spiritual identity that was fine tuned through the trials and sufferings of this world. This is not to say that we will not continue to grow spiritually in heaven.

We do not see heaven as a place where we will cease to grow spiritually. Since we will spiritually be in the beginning of the heavenly dwelling as we are when we ascend unto it, then we can at least assume that heaven will be as the nature and character of those spiritual and faithful saints we encounter in our every day life in this world.

The nature of heaven, therefore, will at least be as the nature of the faithful of the church. We will dwell in the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But we will also dwell in the presence of a great cloud of faithful witnesses as Abraham, Paul,

and those we presently see among the disciples who are faithful to the Lord (See Hb 12:1). If heaven is just this, then certainly it is a place where all of us want to be.

It is not reasonable to assume that we will lose our free-moral agency in heaven. We will not become heavenly robots. Free moral agency demands choice and choice is the foundation for spiritual growth. **It is thus not reasonable to assume that spiritual growth will cease upon our entrance into the realm of the new heavens and earth.** What is exciting about our vision of heaven is to view it from the perspective of having been there a million “earth years” from the time of its beginning. We must view the environment of heaven as the dwelling of saints who have had the opportunity to spiritually grow throughout millions of “earth years” of existence in the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We must view ourselves as having been affected by the holiness of God. That effect will certainly spiritually grow us to heights beyond what we could possibly reach on this earth.

Chapter 2

~ The Description Of Heaven ~

The Bible makes many statements concerning what heaven will be. Though it is difficult to fully understand the nature of what is beyond our experiences, the tranquil nature of this eternal environment is conveyed to some extent through our earthly defined words the Spirit used in order to metaphorically take our minds beyond this world to a realm of wonder. When we assimilate the meaning of all these Bible statements into the concept of heaven, then truly the words of Paul in **Romans 8:18** are significant: ***“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”***

What Paul was saying is that the sufferings of this life are not sufficient to earn the tremendous reward

of glory that is yet to come. We cannot suffer enough trials and persecutions in this life, in other words, to be equally awarded the prize of the glory to come. The prize far outweighs any price that we might offer to purchase it. It is for this reason that heaven is received by grace, not works.

A. The Environment Of Heaven

Heaven will be an environment different from this present world. It is often difficult, therefore, to describe heaven with the words of this world. Regardless of the inadequacies of our words, the following are some of the key statements of the Holy Spirit that explain the environment of heaven that is to come for the disciple of Jesus:

DESCRIPTION OF HEAVEN

- ▶ Heaven is a place of **rest** (2 Co 5:1-10; Hb 4:1-4,9-11; Rv 14:13).
- ▶ Heaven is a place of **joy** (Mt 25:21; Lk 15:7,10; see Rv 7:13-17; 21:4).
- ▶ Heaven is a place of **righteousness** (2 Pt 3:13; see Rv 22:15).
- ▶ Heaven is a place **without physical inflictions** (Rv 7:16,17; 21:4).
- ▶ Heaven is a place of **no death** (Lk 20:35,36; see Rv 20:14; 21:4).
- ▶ Heaven is a place of **no sorrow** (Rv 7:16,17; see Rv 21:4).
- ▶ Heaven is a place of **glory** (Rm 8:18; 2 Co 4:17; Cl 3:4).
- ▶ Heaven is a place of **worship** (Rv 4:5; 7:11-15; 21:22).
- ▶ Heaven is a place of **no night** (Rv 22:5).
- ▶ Heaven is **not a place of flesh and blood** (1 Co 15:50).
- ▶ Heaven is a place **where there is no need of marriage** (Lk 20:35,36).
- ▶ Heaven is a **dwelling place of angels** (Mt 18:10).

B. The Reward Of Heaven

Heaven is special for those for whom it is prepared. It is a promised dwelling for God's sanctified who have endured the trials of this present world (See Mt 5:10-12; Rm 8:18; 2 Co 4:17). Because the saints have endured and overcome this world by their faith, God will give to them the eternal habitation of heaven (See 1 Jn 5:4). The saints will have an existence of rest because of their toil in the world. For those who remain faithful to the Lord, heaven will be a place of eternal rest in the comfort of God. Christians thus yearn for this environment in order to be with Jesus for eternity. It is their desire on earth to be with Jesus forever.

THE REWARD OF HEAVEN

- ▶ Heaven is a **reward** (Mt 5:11,12; Cl 3:24).
- ▶ Heaven is an **inheritance** (Ep 1:14; Cl 1:12; 3:24; 1 Pt 1:4).
- ▶ Heaven is **immortality** (1 Co 15:42,50; 2 Co 5:4).
- ▶ Heaven is a **crown of victory** (1 Co 9:24,25; 2 Tm 4:8; 1 Pt 5:4; Rv 2:10).
- ▶ Heaven is a **crown of life** (Js 1:12).

C. Bible Metaphors Of Heaven

Through metaphorical statements and words, the Holy Spirit sought to excite our thinking concerning the nature and environment of heaven.

Only through metaphor could the Spirit take our minds above this present world in order to focus our thinking on what is above the environment in which we live.

The following are some of the beautiful metaphors of the Bible that the Spirit used in order to explain the environment of heaven:

1. Heaven is a spiritual house.

In contrast to the physical body we now possess, Paul promised that there is a “house” that is **not made with hands** with which we will be clothed in the eternal dwelling of heaven. *“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, [this body] is destroyed, we have a **building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens**”* (2 Co 5:1). It is for this house that we yearn. *“We also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the **redemption of our body**”* (Rm 8:23; see 2 Co 5:2-8).

We seek to put off this tabernacle in order to be clothed with a **“spiritual body”** that is from God (1 Co 15:44; see 2 Co 5:3). We yearn for the redemption of this present body out of its present environment of death, mortality and corruptibility.

The literal meaning of the word “house” means “dwelling.” A house is a place of location, presence and assurance. In a figurative (metaphorical) manner, therefore, we will have a spiritual body that

will give us presence in heaven. We will have a spiritual body in which to dwell.

We will not be found naked, that is, without a bodily presence. Paul stated, *“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven”* (2 Co 5:2). Therefore, we do not seek to be “unclothed” from bodily presence. We seek to be clothed with a spiritual body that will exist in an environment suited for its dwelling. Paul explained,

For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. ... we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord” (2 Co 5:4-6).

2. Heaven is the place of the temple.

The word “temple” is metaphorically used in the New Testament in reference to our body (See 1 Co 6:19) and the church (See 1 Co 3:16). Jesus even used the word metaphorically to refer to His own body while on earth (See Mt 26:61; Jn 2:19).

The word “temple” is also used in reference to God’s dwelling in heaven. John recorded, *“The temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, and earthquake, and great hail”* (Rv 11:19).

We would not assume that there is a literal temple of wood and stone in heaven. John wants us to think beyond the physical temple of Jerusalem. He desired that we focus on the metaphorical meaning of his use of the word “temple.”

In the Old Testament, the Jews sought to go to the temple of God in Jerusalem. It was symbolic of **God’s presence among His people**. It was a place of **solitude, worship** and **closeness** to God. All such feelings are with those who will be in heaven. Heaven is a place of solitude. It is a place of worship and closeness to God. Under the Sinai law, the temple symbolized God’s presence among

His people. It was a place where the righteous could “snuggle up” to the spiritual presence of God and feel the warm security of His loving presence.

3. Heaven is a homeland country.

The Hebrew writer referred to those of the Old Testament who sought a **homeland** (NKJV), or country (NIV) (See Hb 11:14). Though God brought them into the land of Palestine, the Israelites never truly found their eternal homeland in heaven. *“But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country”* (Hb 11:16). Those Jews at the time of Jesus who obeyed the gospel sought for a homeland that was far beyond Palestine.

We seek our own homeland, one in which we can have identity and citizenship with fellow citizens. A homeland, or one’s own country, means a place of **permanent residence**, a place in which one is **not a stranger or pilgrim**. Heaven will be such to all those who discover that this world is not their home. For those who *“confess that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth,”* there will be in heaven a dwelling for permanent citizenship (See Hb 11:13).

Heaven is a place through which one does not journey as a foreigner. It is a dwelling in which citizenship is established and one does not have to wander anymore.

D. Heaven Is A City

The Hebrew writer stated, *“For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come”* (Hb 13:14; see Rv 22:14). This is the *“city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Hb 11:10). It is the city of God that has been prepared for those who have journeyed through the desert of life (See Hb 11:16). Its foundations have been built by God, and thus these foundations are sure and steadfast to last for eternity.

The Hebrew writer was discouraging the Hebrew Christians from returning to the Sinai law and the city of Jerusalem as their center of worship.

For this reason, Jesus said that **the earthly Jerusalem would eventually be destroyed** (See Mt 24). However, the heavenly Jerusalem would never be destroyed. It will continue because it is built and made by God, not by anyone of this world.

In travel one does not make some bush in the countryside his or her destination. We do not travel simply to reach a signpost that states how far it is to the next stop. We seek the city, for in it there is refreshment, security and companionship with others. Once we reach the city we feel that we have accomplished the purpose for our journey. Heaven will be such for those who are strangers and pilgrims on a tempestuous journey through life.

In heaven we will find a place of destination, rest and eternal companionship with those who have also struggled through the journey of life. In heaven we will find an existence (house) that is founded on God Himself. God has built the foundations, and thus, the building is sure, stable and permanent. These foundations will not crack or give way as those foundations of this world that have been made by human hands.

E. Heaven Is An “Abiding Place”

Jesus said to His disciples, *“In My Father’s house are many mansions [dwelling places]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you”* (Jn 14:2). The Greek word here translated “mansions” by some versions means “abiding places.” Heaven is not composed of physical “castles in the sky.” It is a dwelling. We will not be dislocated from presence in heaven, but will be abiding in the presence of God in an embodied state. What Jesus wanted the disciples to know was that there was a definite place reserved for them after this life. They would not be separated from one another by going

into their own “mansions.” Jesus sought in John 14 to give His immediate disciples, and us, emotional security for the tremendous persecutions they were about to endure for His name. He reassured them that they would continue together throughout eternity.

The preceding five metaphors picture heaven as an existence beyond this world. It will be a realm in which our spiritual building (our resurrected body) will dwell. We will be in a worshipful relationship with the Father. We will be close to the presence of God. In this presence, we will be preserved by God in order that we exist throughout eternity. We will no longer be “on the move” to another city or country. We will be where God destined us to be before the creation of the world.

We will have arrived at the “city,” the intended destination of our journey. And thus, we will dwell or abide with God in a presence that has been prepared especially for us. This is the emotional security of the saints. This is the dream that brings Christians together in order to comfort one another in this journey of life.

Chapter 3

~ The Duration Of Heaven ~

As stated in a previous volume, there is no Greek word that the New Testament writers could have used to express the duration of eternity (See *WhatsApp Library*, Vol. 48). **Endless time is not a concept for earthly understanding.** We think that we understand this concept, but we must understand that our perceptions of eternity are simply inadequate.

The inadequacy of the word *aionios* to define time without end is evident in the fact that it has a double meaning. Objective biblical interpreters will recognize this double meaning. In the Old Testament, emphasis was more on **surety**, or **quality**, and not time without end. Something could be “eternal,” and

yet, emphasis might be on the results of that which was considered unending. In other words, when the Greek word *aionios* is used emphasis is more on that endless results of a one-time happening.

In reference to heaven, the qualitative meaning of *aionios* is very important. When the subject of heaven is discussed in the New Testament, it is usually in the context of giving encouragement to Christians who live in a world that does not bring peace of mind. The encouragement of **eternal** heaven, therefore, **carried the meaning of a certain and sure place of rest and relief.**

The giving of the reward of heaven will be a onetime happening after final judgment. However, the results of the giving will continue on without end.

While in the turmoil and stress of persecution and labor in this world, we seek a secure place of relief. God reveals eternal heaven in the sense of promising the persecuted that there is **certainty** of a final rest waiting for them. This is what is important to remember. **The unending existence of the rest is simply understood.** The duration of time without end is evident in the context where heaven is discussed. **Eternality is inherent of the realm of the new heavens and earth.**

When we discuss God, His nature is synonymous of time without end. Thus, when we discuss heaven, the realm of God's existence, its eternity is synonymous with the eternity of God who dwells in it.

The Bible teaches that Christians will be in the presence of God in the eternity of heaven. Only God is indigenously without end. In and of Himself, He can only be that which has no beginning and no ending. This quality of existence, therefore, must originate from Him alone. Therefore, when we talk about the unending existence of the righteous in the presence of God, we conclude that the duration of such an existence in the presence of God, who only

is unending in existence, so will be our existence. **It will be from Him that we source our ability to continue in existence without end.** Everyone else will not have this privilege, for they will not be in the presence of God. They will have been terminated from existence.

Peter wrote *“to the Pilgrims of the Dispersion”* (1 Pt 1:1). His epistle was thus directed primarily to a Jewish audience. It is interesting to note that when he discussed the subject of heaven, he did not use the Greek word *aionios*. He wrote that God has *“begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you”* (1 Pt 1:3,4).

It is possible that Peter did not use the word *aionios* with his Jewish audience in order not to be misunderstood. He was emphasizing the unending nature of an existence that is not subject to the terminal curses of all that we experience in this physical world. He was writing to those Jewish Christians who had lost all hope in the benefits of national Israel.

The inheritance that is reserved in heaven is not terminal. It is incorruptible, that is, imperishable. It cannot be defiled with sin. Neither will it fade away. Peter wanted to emphasize to his Jewish readership the fact that this dwelling or existence is without end. It is an existence in which the Christian will dwell in the absence of persecution and conflict with those who are of this world.

The following points emphasize the unending duration of what is in store for the faithful.

We must consider these points in view of the fact that these promises are given in the Bible in order to encourage Christians with an existence that is in the presence of God who is unending in nature and being.

A. Heaven Is Sure & Certain Salvation

The Hebrew writer stated concerning Jesus, *“And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”* (Hb 5:9). It is certain that our salvation is sure in Christ, not because we meritoriously earned salvation, but because of the grace of God (See Ep 2:8,9). The certainty of our salvation is without end as we remain faithful in walking in the light (See 1 Jn 1:7). And since we will remain in the presence of God in heaven who is light, we will continue existence without end.

In heaven we will remain in the light throughout eternity (See Rv 22:5). We will be eternal because we will have a spiritual body from the Lord that is immortal because it will dwell in the light of God (See 2 Co 5:1-8). It will be eternal because it will be in the presence of our life-giving Creator. We will be sustained in heaven by the light of Jesus who will have eternally redeemed our body from this present physical world of mortality.

Through His blood sacrifice on the cross, Jesus has already redeemed (purchased) our soul for eternity (See Ep 1:7). We subsequently have eternal life in Christ (See 1 Jn 5:11). Now we groan for the redemption of our body. *“We groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation that is from heaven”* (2 Co 5:2).

We groan because we know that our present physical body is temporary. It does not have the capacity to dwell without end. In the context of the whole creation that also *“groans and labors with birth pains together until now”* (Rm 8:22), Paul says *“even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body”* (Rm 8:23). We groan in this temporal body for an immortal, incorruptible body from God that will eternally dwell in the presence of God.

The “eternal salvation” of which the Hebrew writer speaks is a salvation we have received through the grace of God. The effects of the cleansing blood of

Jesus will exist in our lives without end.

Our timelessness depends on God's work, not because we are inherently eternal. It is only by and through Him that we will exist in eternity.

Our soul has been redeemed. Now we wait for the redemption of our body that has been guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection from the dead (See 1 Co 15:20-22). **Those who have been raised with Christ from the grave of baptism will be raised again with an eternal body from God** (See Rm 6:4,5; 1 Co 15:22). It will be in this body that we will dwell in the presence of God, and thus, draw from His eternity in order that we dwell with Him without end.

B. Heaven Is Sure & Certain Life

Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he will live. And whoever lives and believes in Me will never die"* (Jn 11:25,26). Jesus used the word "death" in this statement in contrast to life. Death is termination. Life is without end. Jesus added, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death"* (Jn 8:51). **Death means separation and separation means that something will be terminated.** In reference to our physical body, it is the termination of our body for it will never exist again as it did while alive on earth.

In contrast to the termination of our bodies in physical death, our immortal bodies will not suffer physical death, or termination. The spiritual, or second death, is termination from existence. But Jesus came to give us hope for both an immortal body and an eternal existence in our resurrected bodies in the presence of God.

In the eternal existence of heaven, there will be no concept of separation from God, and thus, no death. There will be no concept of the termination of something that exists in the presence of the life-giving eternal God.

He who believes on Jesus will never die from the presence of the Lord. He will not suffer the second death (See Rv 20:13,14; 21:8).

In the present life one's eternal life is certainly conditional. It is conditioned on the fact that one must continue to live the gospel of Jesus. The apostate loses his or her eternal life in this life because he or she has turned away from the gospel (See 2 Pt 2:20-22). He or she has lost his or her eternality because one has voluntarily given oneself over to that which separates him or her from the One who can give unending existence.

Sin separates one from God who only has the power to maintain our unending existence. Living the gospel, therefore, is not a onetime baptismal event in the life of the believer that brings life without conditions. One must continue to live in the light of the gospel in order that the blood of the cross continue to wash one of all sin (See 1 Jn 1:7).

The surety of heaven's existence was defined in **Matthew 25:46** when Jesus used the Greek word *aionion* to establish a contrast between the destinies of the righteous and the disobedient. *“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”* The wicked will definitely receive punishment for their transgressions. Regardless of what one may believe concerning the duration of hell, there is one fact of hell that is without question. **The wicked will suffer punishment in a tormenting hell that has been prepared for the devil and his angels.** The unrighteous, therefore, have nothing in the future to which to look forward than the tormenting punishment of hell.

On the other hand, **the righteous will definitely receive life because of their obedient faith.** As one destiny is certain, so is the other. The unrighteous will receive punishment that will have unending consequences. The righteous will receive life that will also have unending consequences.

Jesus spoke of a reward for those who have left houses, brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers

in this life, but will gain spiritual houses, brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers in this life, **“and in the age to come, eternal life”** (Mk 10:29,30). Though the phrase “age to come” in the ministry context of Jesus could refer to the gospel dispensation where the obedient have eternal life (See 1 Jn 5:11), we will certainly carry this life into heaven where we will dwell with all who remained faithful while the world exists.

In Christ we have a worldwide extended family of brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers. This same spiritual family will go together into eternal life in heaven.

C. Heaven Is A Sure & Certain Abiding

Heaven is a sure and certain place of abiding. John revealed when he wrote, **“And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever”** (1 Jn 2:17). In contrast to the passing away of the world (See 2 Pt 3:10,11), the obedient will not pass away. The will of God abides. We thus assume that those who submit to and live the gospel will also abide. There is an abiding existence planned for all those who remain faithful to the gospel. Because of their commitment to the gospel, the righteous are destined for a habitation where there is no “passing away.”

D. Heaven Is A Certain Place To Dwell

Heaven is a sure and certain dwelling. Paul wrote, **“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”** (2 Co 5:1). This present physical body will die. After it dies, it will go through corruption, that is, decay away to dust. Paul contrasts the temporary nature of this earthly body with the “habitation” with which we will be clothed for heavenly dwelling. It will be a habitation that will not die as this earthly body. And since it will not die, it is a habitation that will exist with surety in the new heavens and earth.

God makes us a promise in the following statement

of Paul: *“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”* (1 Co 15:50). For this reason we want to be *“further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life”* (2 Co 5:4). Therefore, we must be raised a *“spiritual body”* (1 Co 15:44) in order to dwell in the spiritual environment of heaven where our bodies will never go through corruption. In this dwelling our building from God cannot be destroyed.

In the context of **1 Corinthians 15** Paul used the words “corruptible” and “mortal” in reference to the body of this present world. Such terms refer to what is temporary, that is, **that which has an end or is terminal**. The words “corruptible” and “mortal” are used in contrast to “incorruptible” and “immortal.” “Incorruptible” and “immortal” refer to what is not terminal. These words indicate unending nature; that which will go on without end. This is the nature of heaven. This is also the nature of our spiritual bodies that will exist in heaven.

Heaven is a dwelling place for the spiritual body that has the nature of unending existence. Our resurrected bodies will be incorruptible and immortal because heaven is a place where decay and mortality do not exist. It will be such a place because we will dwell in the presence of God who will sustain us for eternity.

A. Heaven Is “Always” With The Lord

Paul revealed, *“And thus we will always be with the Lord”* (1 Th 4:17; see 2 Co 5:8; Ph 1:23). He made this statement in the context of the resurrection of the righteous and ascension in companionship with the living saints. The righteous will “always” be with the Lord who exists in eternity. The righteous will be in the **presence** of the Lord in an unending state of existence (See 2 Co 5:8).

We are servants of an eternal Lord who is the beginning and the end (See Rv 1:8). Our Lord dwells in unending existence. Our dwelling, therefore, will be the same. We will be with Him in His presence without end. There will be no end of our dwelling in

coexistence with the Lord. It is the presence of the Lord that makes this all possible.

The unrighteous will be destroyed because they will be thrust from the presence of the Lord (See 2 Th 1:7-9). However, the righteous will be in the presence of the Lord who maintains their endless existence (See 2 Co 5:8).

In **John 14:1-3** Jesus promised the apostles that He was going to prepare a dwelling place for them. He used **future tense** in the statement as if it were a place to be prepared in the future. However, Paul wrote in the **past tense** when he revealed, *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him”* (1 Co 2:9).

When Jesus was on earth with the apostles, it was not as if He had to go and construct some physical place for them in heaven. That which was in the future to the minds of the apostles before Jesus’ ascension, was prepared by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 2:9. The residence of disembodied spirits is there. However, the new heavens and earth are yet to come for our dwelling.

The new heavens and earth is a dwelling place for the resurrected and changed “spiritual body.” It is the place where soul and spirit will be embodied with a glorious body. In this sense, this heaven does not yet exist because the final resurrection of all saints has not yet happened. Only after the final resurrection, when we possess our “heavenly habitation from God,” will we dwell in the new heavens and earth. It is the dwelling for which we all long. It is in this habitation with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in an endless “time” that we seek to be.



ABREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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